



**“LISTENING TO THE  
LAND, LEARNING  
FROM THE PEOPLE.”**



**INDIGENOUS  
YATRA**

**Unlocking the Power of Local Wisdom**



## *“What shifts when indigenous wisdom and grassroots voices are centered in decision-making?”*



Artist: Nirupma Malik. 'Celebrating the Wisdom Box'

The Indigenous Yatra emerged from a simple yet powerful question:

What shifts when indigenous wisdom and grassroots voices are centered in decision-making?

India—and much of the Global South—is navigating a polycrisis of “wicked problems”: deeply interconnected challenges that resist simple, top-down solutions. Climate disruption, fragile infrastructure, agrarian distress, poverty, and public health gaps are not isolated issues; they are systemic and deeply rooted.

At the heart of these challenges are communities who experience them every day—and who have, over generations, developed practical, context-specific responses. These lived experiences and local solutions represent a rich, often overlooked body of knowledge.

**Listening to them is not just an act of inclusion;** it is essential to understanding the problem—and unlocking pathways to meaningful, grounded change.

# Why Listening?

The mechanisms for gathering knowledge at scale have historically been blunt instruments: surveys, elections, occasional public consultations.

These methods are slow, extractive, and often lose the nuance and emotional weight of lived experience in translation.

The listening campaign adopted a participatory, community-led approach, moving beyond traditional research or documentation models. To record the community voices and capture the urgency in the voices, Atmashakti Trust partnered with Socratus to use the digital AI tool of collecting data through voice recordings.

The “Voice Report” proposes a different model consonant with Wystems Thinking: a frictionless, voice-first, multilingual intake that turns hyperlocal, embodied knowledge into a connected system - continuous streams of observations and ideas that can travel from place to place without losing their soul.



Artist: Nirupma Malik.: Indigeneous Cultural Ethos

## LISTENING AT SCALE

**26 DAYS | 7 STATES | 32 DISTRICTS**

14, 670  
VOICES RECORDED



57, 214  
People Participation



3, 427  
VILLAGES REACHED



The initiative is being led in collaboration with the National Consortium to Combat Malnutrition (NCCM) and 50 grassroots organizations across 7 states in India.



# The Listening Approach

The Indigenous Yatra's listening campaign was designed as a participatory, tech-enabled process to record voices directly from the ground. It was implemented in partnership with the Socratus Foundation using their AI-enabled Voice Report platform.

## Approach

- **Community-led facilitation:** *Atmashakti's grassroots teams were trained by Socratus' team members as Voice Reporters to engage directly with communities.*
- **Voice booths & outreach:** *Dedicated booths and village-level mobilization ensured wide participation.*
- **Thematic prompts:** *Daily questions focused on Indigenous knowledge, livelihoods, health, and aspirations.*
- **Short responses:** *15-second voice recordings enabled clear, accessible, and inclusive participation.*

## Process

- *Voice Reporters used the platform to access questions, facilitate participation, and record responses in real time.*
- *Voices were recorded in local languages, enabled by the platform's multilingual feature, ensuring authenticity.*
- *The AI-enabled system processed and stored responses, creating a structured repository of community voices.*
- *Participants could also self-register and contribute independently from their localities.*

## Key Features

- **Inclusive:** *Voice-based input enabled participation across literacy levels and languages.*
- **Scalable:** *Large volumes of voices collected across regions simultaneously.*
- **Authentic:** *Insights captured in people's own words, languages, and cultural contexts.*





# *Real voices from the ground and not just data, carrying insights of ecology, economy, and emotion.*

## **Thematic Areas of Inquiry**

The listening questions were designed around key thematic areas to record insights on community aspirations, current challenges, and Indigenous knowledge practices. These thematic areas emerged through community dialogues, state consultations, and workshops conducted during the Indigenous Yatra, reflecting the priorities, challenges, and lived realities of the communities.

### *Key Themes*

- **Traditional Farming Practices**

To understand how Indigenous communities maintain food sovereignty through traditional farming practices (by conserving native seeds, using local inputs, and sustaining climate-resilient cropping systems).

- **Forest-Based Knowledge**

To ascertain how communities rely and use forest produce for food, medicine, nutrition, livelihood support and practice sustainable resource use.

- **Cultural Identity**

To explore how communities preserve and transmit languages, traditions, and cultural practices across generations.

- **Economic Aspirations & Micro-Entrepreneurship**

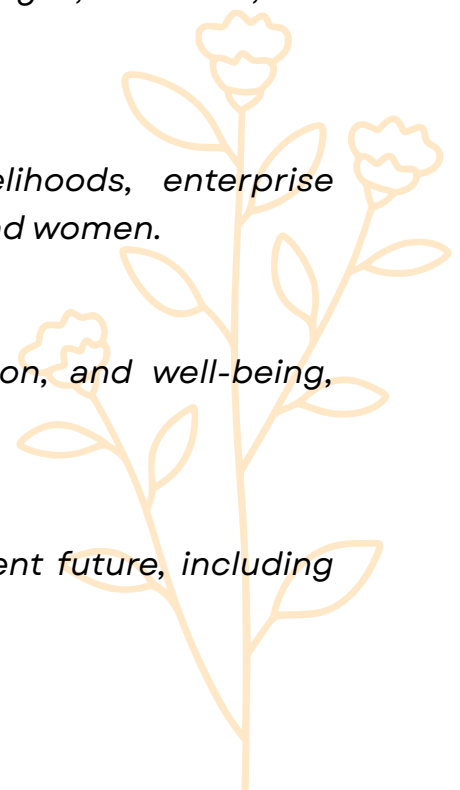
To understand community aspirations for local livelihoods, enterprise development, and income security, especially for youth and women.

- **Community Well-being & Mental Health**

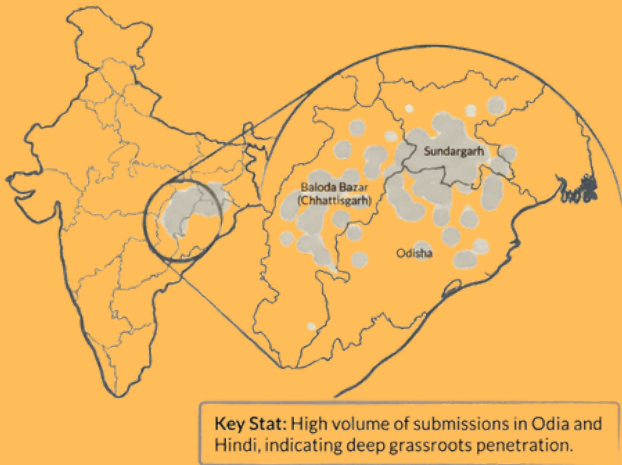
To capture insights on stress, resilience, social cohesion, and well-being, rooted in community practices and relationships.

- **'Viksit Bharat' Vision**

To gather community perspectives on India's development future, including priorities and recommendations for an equitable society.



# Who we Heard From



## 9607 Voices Across

Odisha  
Madhya Pradesh  
Uttar Pradesh  
Jharkhand  
Chhattisgarh  
Rajasthan  
Maharashtra

## Gender & Geographic Voice Landscape

### Geographic Voice Landscape

Participation was strongest from key states including Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh, reflecting deep engagement across tribal-dominated regions.

### Gender-wise Voice Landscape

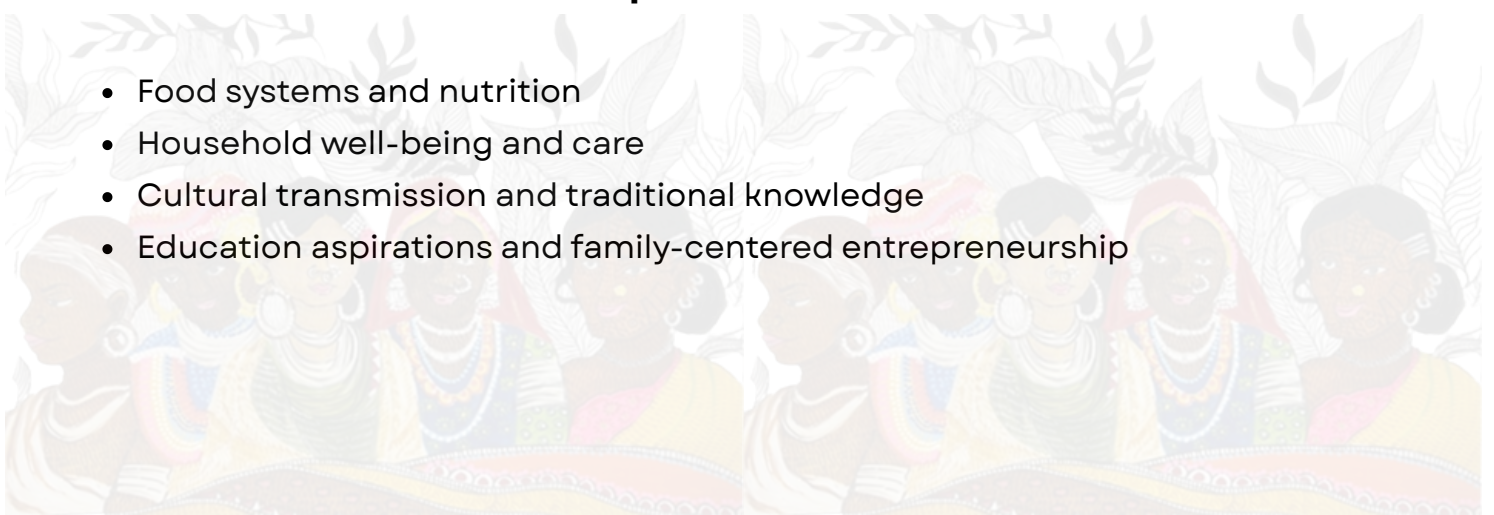
The listening campaign revealed distinct focus areas across gender:

#### Male Voices tended to emphasize:

- Production systems and farming practices
- Infrastructure and development needs
- Community identity and collective structures
- Economic growth and expansion opportunities

#### Female Voices tended to emphasize:

- Food systems and nutrition
- Household well-being and care
- Cultural transmission and traditional knowledge
- Education aspirations and family-centered entrepreneurship



# Thematic Response Mix



*These voices reflect the beliefs of Indigenous communities from different parts of the country, expressing their needs, fears, and aspirations. Together, they offer a picture of what these cultures and their knowledge systems need to survive and grow into systems of self-reliance, risk reduction, and knowledge continuity.*



“DIGNITY LIES IN BEING SEEN, HEARD, AND RESPECTED—WHERE DEVELOPMENT STRENGTHENS OUR WAYS OF LIFE, NOT REPLACES THEM.”

# INSIGHTS



VOICES FROM THE LAND



## FARMING PRACTICES

With 1,376 responses (14%), agriculture emerges as a core resilience system, not just a livelihood option.

### Current Challenges



- Rising **dependence on hybrid seeds** and external inputs
- **Water scarcity** affecting second crops (Rabi)
- **Soil degradation due to changing practices**
- **Environmental damage** (e.g., mining, deforestation)

### Why this matters?

Traditional farming systems are central to risk reduction, climate resilience, and self-reliance in Indigenous communities.

In a context of rising costs, climate variability, and ecological stress, these practices offer locally adapted, sustainable solutions that are critical for both livelihood security and long-term resilience.

“We save seeds from every harvest so we don’t have to depend on the market.”

“Our traditional crops survive even when rains are less.”

Quotes from Voice Report

### Community Aspirations

- Revival of indigenous seed systems
- Expansion of organic farming & kitchen gardens (Poshan Vatika)
- Reduced dependency on external markets

### What communities said

- Strong reliance on indigenous seeds and mixed cropping systems
- Preference for low-cost, low-input agriculture
- Farming seen as identity and survival, not just production

### Indigenous practices

- Seed preservation using ash, neem leaves, local herbs
- Storage in mud granaries and earthen pots
- Use of cow dung manure and natural compost
- Cultivation of climate-resilient crops (millets, pulses)



“

*“Mahua, roots, and forest leaves are our food and medicine.”*

*“We stayed healthy because of what we got from the forest.”*

Quotes from Voice Report

”

## Why this matters?

Forests serve as nutrition systems, health systems, and livelihood safety nets. Indigenous healers are custodians of knowledge about plant-based remedies that communities rely on for healing and well-being.

However, migration, loss of forest access, and dominant narratives that marginalise natural healing practices are causing this knowledge to decline, even within communities. To ensure future sustainability, these knowledge holders must be nurtured and supported so that traditional practices, self-reliance, risk reduction, and knowledge continuity can be preserved.

## What communities said

- Forest foods are critical for daily nutrition and seasonal survival
- Indicated strong knowledge of medicinal plants and wild foods



Image :  
Forest Walk to identify  
Medicinal Plants;  
Odisha;2025



**With 880 responses, forests emerge as a hidden pillar of nutrition security**

## Current Challenges

- Declining access due to forest degradation and restrictions
- Loss of biodiversity
- Reduced availability of forest foods

## Community Aspirations



- Inclusion of forest foods in PDS and Mid-Day Meals
- Protection and regeneration of forests
- Recognition of forest-based knowledge in policy

## Indigenous practices

- Seasonal harvesting of forest produce like Mahua, Kendu, Char, tubers
- Use of forest herbs for preventive and curative health
- Traditional food preparation using local methods and materials



## Why this matters?

Culture is the foundation of identity, resilience, and intergenerational continuity. Indigenous communities in India are especially vulnerable to cultural and language loss, along with the erosion of traditional ways of life. Rapid modernization, migration, and changing social influences are weakening festivals, art forms, oral traditions, and youth connection to cultural roots. Preserving Indigenous knowledge through songs, folklore, rituals, community festivals, traditional games, and storytelling is essential for sustaining identity and continuity across generations.



Image :  
Folk Dance Competition; Odisha; 2025

“

*“Our children are forgetting our language and songs.”*

*“Without our traditions, we lose who we are.”*

Quotes from Voice Report

”

## Current Challenges

- Rapid **cultural erosion** due to modern influences and migration
- Decline in traditional festivals, art, and oral traditions
- **Youth disconnect** from cultural roots

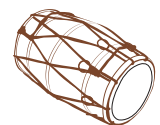
**Culture is consistently linked to mental well-being, identity, and social stability across responses**  
(1535 responses)

## Community Aspirations

- Revival of indigenous seed systems
- Expansion of organic farming & kitchen gardens (Poshan Vatika)
- Reduced dependency on external markets

## What communities said

- Deep concern over loss of language, traditions, and rituals
- Cultural practices seen as essential to community cohesion



## Indigenous practices

- Knowledge transfer through songs, folklore, rituals
- Community festivals (e.g., Karma, Nuakhai)
- Traditional games and storytelling



## ECONOMIC ASPIRATIONS

*Economic aspirations are the strongest signal across all voices, reflecting urgent livelihood needs.*

### Current Challenges

- Lack of access to capital and credit
- Limited local employment opportunities
- Poor market linkages and pricing
- Decline of traditional occupations

### Why this matters?

The economic aspirations of Indigenous communities reflect pressing livelihood needs and a growing interest in micro-enterprise. Yet limited access to capital and markets often prevents these efforts from succeeding, pushing people to migrate to cities for work. This migration leaves women, older adults, and children behind and weakens the transmission of skills and traditional rural livelihoods.



### Community Aspirations

- Micro-enterprises at village level
- Access to Rs 10,000–20,000 seed capital
- Fair market access and pricing

### What communities said

- Strong demand for local livelihood opportunities
- Migration is seen as a compulsion, not a choice



### Traditional Indigenous Livelihoods

- Bamboo crafts, leaf plate making, livestock rearing
- Traditional artisanal and forest-based livelihoods

*“If we get small capital, we can earn from our village itself.”*

*“We don’t want to leave our homes for work.”*

Quotes from Voice Report



### Why this matters?

Communities are asking for a version of development that improves daily life while protecting their forests, culture, and identity. It also highlights real gaps in roads, water, electricity, healthcare, education, and livelihoods, making community voice essential for policies that are both effective and inclusive.

At a deeper level, it matters because sustainable development only works when it is locally relevant and shaped by the people it affects. The 945 responses also show that communities are actively engaged and want to help define the future, not just receive decisions from above.

“

***“We need roads, water, and jobs in our villages.”***

***“Development should not take away our forests and culture.”***

*Quotes from Voice Report*

”

**With 945 responses (10%), communities actively engage with and shape the future development narrative**

### Current Challenges (Lack of)

- Clean water
- Roads and electricity
- Healthcare and education
- Weak implementation of government schemes

### Community Aspirations

- Inclusive and locally relevant development
- Stronger voice in governance and policy
- Balanced development that preserves identity

### What communities said

People expressed a clear need for roads, water, electricity, healthcare, and education in their villages. They also emphasized that development should create dignified livelihoods and not come at the cost of forests and cultural life.

### Indigenous practices

Community-led governance and local resource management remain important strengths. These practices support more accountable decisions and can help development stay grounded in local realities.



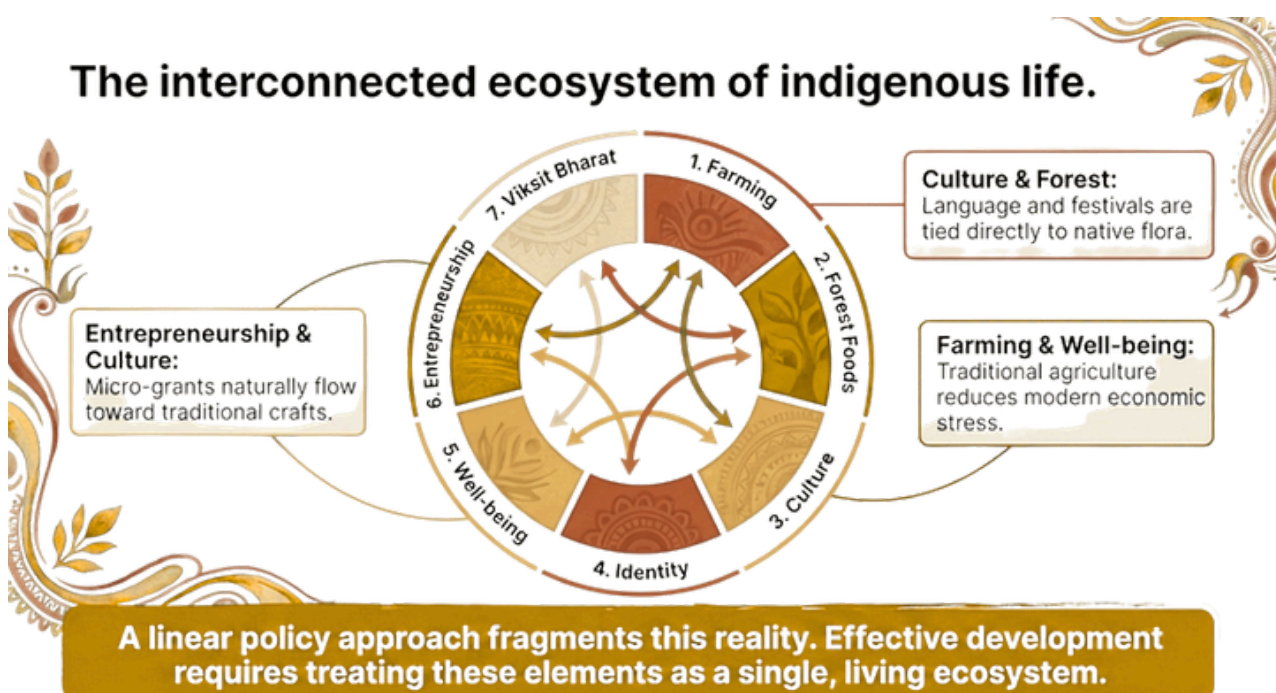
## The Interconnected Ecosystem of Indigenous Lifestyle

The insights from the listening campaign reveal that Indigenous life cannot be understood through isolated sectors such as agriculture, health, or livelihoods. Instead, it exists as a deeply interconnected ecosystem, where ecology, economy, culture, and well-being are intrinsically linked.

For Indigenous communities, farming is not just a means of production—it is tied to food, nutrition, cultural practices, and environmental stewardship. Forests are not merely resources, but sources of identity, medicine, sustenance, and spiritual connection. Similarly, livelihoods are embedded within community relationships, traditional knowledge, and local ecosystems.

This interconnectedness offers a critical insight: challenges such as malnutrition, economic distress, or cultural erosion cannot be addressed in silos. They require integrated, community-led approaches that recognize and build upon these existing systems.

The following section presents a deeper exploration of key thematic areas, illustrating how Indigenous knowledge and practices continue to sustain this ecosystem—while also highlighting the pressures that threaten its continuity.





## What we Heard

*Across geographies, themes, and respondent groups, the voices reveal a deeply interconnected reality—where livelihoods, culture, ecology, and well-being are inseparable.*



### ***Livelihoods Are Central, but Must Be Local***

Livelihoods are seen not just as income, but as dignity and stability. Communities aspire for economic security through local opportunities, not migration. There is a strong preference for:

- Micro-enterprises rooted in traditional skills
- Agriculture and forest-based livelihoods
- Fair pricing and market access



### ***Traditional Knowledge Is a Living System—But at Risk***

Across farming, food, medicine, and culture, communities hold rich knowledge systems that:

Sustain biodiversity

Ensure nutrition and health

Strengthen resilience

However, this knowledge is rapidly eroding due to modernization, migration, and lack of recognition.

Communities are not asking to preserve knowledge as heritage—but to revive and use it.



### ***Food, Nutrition, and Health Are Deeply Connected to Ecology***

Nutrition security lies in local ecosystems, not external supply chains alone. Communities emphasized:

Forest foods and millets as key to nutrition

Chemical-free, traditional diets as healthier

Nature-based practices as central to well-being

Yet, current systems (PDS, MDM) often exclude these local foods.



### ***Culture Is the Foundation of Identity and Resilience***

Cultural practices—language, festivals, rituals, and collective traditions—are central to:

Social cohesion

Mental well-being

Intergenerational learning

At the same time, communities expressed concern over:

Loss of language and traditions

Youth disconnect from identity

Cultural erosion is directly linked to loss of resilience and belonging.



## ***Women and Youth Are Key Drivers of Change***

Women are central to food systems, knowledge transfer, and micro-enterprises

Youth aspire for opportunities but face limited local options

There is a strong desire for:

Skill-building

Entrepreneurship support

Participation in decision-making

Investing in women and youth strengthens both economic and cultural systems.



## ***Development Gaps Continue to Limit Potential***

Communities highlighted persistent gaps in:

Water, roads, electricity

Healthcare and education

Digital connectivity

These gaps create barriers to:

Livelihoods

Well-being

Access to opportunities

Infrastructure is not just a service gap—it is a dignity and equity issue.





## Key Insights / Takeaways

Indigenous communities want development that improves livelihoods, health, and infrastructure without eroding their culture, knowledge, or environment. Their priorities are local, inclusive, and rooted in strengthening what already sustains them.

The Indigenous Yatra Listening Campaign captures a powerful collective insight from rural and Indigenous communities: livelihoods, culture, ecology, and well-being are deeply interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation.

Across voices, there is a strong aspiration for dignified, local livelihoods, with communities preferring micro-enterprises and agriculture-based opportunities rooted in traditional skills. At the same time, Indigenous knowledge systems—spanning farming, food, medicine, and culture—continue to sustain resilience, yet are rapidly eroding due to modernization and lack of recognition.

Communities highlight that nutrition and health are intrinsically linked to local ecosystems, with forest foods and traditional crops playing a critical role. However, these remain underrepresented in formal systems such as PDS and Mid-Day Meals. Cultural practices, languages, and traditions are seen as foundational to identity, social cohesion, and mental well-being, even as they face increasing decline.

Women and youth emerge as key agents of change—with women central to food systems and knowledge transmission, and youth seeking meaningful opportunities within their own communities. However, persistent gaps in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and digital access continue to limit these aspirations.

Overall, communities envision a future where development is inclusive, locally relevant, and participatory—one that strengthens Indigenous systems rather than replacing them.

# FROM LISTENING TO ACTION

Way Forward



Artist: Nirupma Malik.: The Travelling Wisdom box



# Unlocking the Power of Local Wisdom

## The Opportunity

The Listening Campaign brings forward the voices of over **9,600 community members** across rural and tribal regions, revealing a powerful and consistent message: development must be **locally grounded, inclusive, and rooted in dignity.**

These communities are not asking for externally designed solutions. They are articulating a clear vision—one that builds on their **existing knowledge systems, local economies, and cultural practices.** What is required now is not reinvention, but **recognition, investment, and alignment** to strengthen what already works.



Wisdom Box; Odisha; 2025



# Unlocking the Power of Local Wisdom

## Why This Matters

In the face of climate stress, economic vulnerability, and social change, Indigenous systems provide **practical and resilient pathways**. Traditional farming supports climate adaptation, forest-based foods strengthen nutrition, and local enterprises enable dignified livelihoods.

At the same time, cultural practices sustain **identity, well-being, and social cohesion**. Yet, these systems are under pressure—from ecological degradation, migration, and erosion of knowledge.

The message is clear: development must not replace these systems—it must build upon them.

## Priority Areas

Communities emphasise strengthening **local economies** through micro-enterprises for women and youth, alongside **revitalising Indigenous agriculture and food systems**. There is a strong call to integrate traditional knowledge into **policy and development planning**, while **investing in cultural systems and community well-being**.

Access to essential infrastructure—water, roads, healthcare, education, and digital connectivity is critical to enabling these aspirations, while **women and youth emerge as key drivers of change**.

## What Your Support Enables

Your support can scale a **community-led development model**, one that connects grassroots voices to policy, strengthens local economies, and builds long-term resilience. It enables a shift from delivering solutions to co-creating them with communities.

# About Voice Report

*VoiceReport is a digital civic platform rooted in a profoundly democratic and humanistic idea: that every person, regardless of their language, location, or social standing, holds wisdom that can enrich everyone's lives and that when connected with other people's wisdom, will become a wisdom commons that benefits us all.*

*The platform's motto - "**Report anything, from anywhere, in any language**" - is both a tagline and a manifesto. It asserts that there's collective wisdom behind the texture of lived experience, the granular knowledge of how a neighbourhood floods during monsoon, the knowledge of where a road is crumbling or how a community is struggling, or what creative solutions a group of citizens has devised.*



**Socratus**

*This collective wisdom is not (only) the kind stored in datasets or policy papers, but hyperlocal, embodied, multilingual wisdom that has historically been invisible to those with decision-making power.*



INDIGENOUS  
YATRA

***“What becomes possible  
when development begins  
by listening—and Indigenous  
wisdom is placed at the  
center of how we shape the  
future?”***

---

Atmashakti  
TRUST

101-A, Friends Colony East, New Delhi - 110065  
[info@atmashaktitrust.com](mailto:info@atmashaktitrust.com)  
[atmashaktitrust@gmail.com](mailto:atmashaktitrust@gmail.com)  
<https://atmashaktitrust.org/>